RICE UNIVERSITY

Program in Writing & Communication

Critical Thinking in a Democracy

Spring 2016 Tues/Thurs. 2:30-3:45pm / Classroom RZR121

INSTRUCTORS

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Office Hours: W 1:30-3:30pm & by appt.

There are no required books for the class; readings posted on Owlspace or on reserve in Fondren Library will be assigned throughout the semester. Papers of various lengths will be assigned as well as oral presentations. Attendance is mandatory and active participation in class discussion will be a major part of the final grade.

Course Outline

I. Confirmation Bias and the Science of How We Determine What We Believe
II. Self-selection bias
III. Media's role in self-selection bias
IV. Political manipulation of the media/Media manipulation of Politics
V. Propaganda
   a. In general
   b. Military propaganda
   c. Free speech as an antidote
VI. 2016 Presidential Election
VII. 21st Century Racial Relations
   a. Prejudice as an outgrowth of confirmation bias in the law
   b. Stereotype threat
   c. Civil Rights Movement *redux*?

Interwoven throughout the course will be instruction on writing, including the art of writing and specific rules of research & references.

Assignments

In general, there will be one paper assigned per week varying between 2-5 pages, not all of which will require additional research. You will be expected to write differing types of papers, such as opinion/editorial pieces, persuasive argument, a balanced presentation of factual information, and analysis of issues discussed in the readings and in class. Proper reference for all of your research and sources is required, as well as correct spelling, grammar, punctuation and writing structure. In addition, a final paper will be due on the date of the final. Periodically, a short presentation based on your research will be required. Finally, every student is required to visit the Center for Written, Oral and Visual Communication (located in Fondren Library) for

help and/or review of papers *at least* twice during this course. We strongly urge you to take advantage of the help the CWOVC can offer you as early in the semester as possible, and continue for more advanced help as the semester progresses. Appointments can be made at the Center's website: cwovc.rice.edu.

Final Grades will be calculated as follows:

Weekly Papers:	50%
Class Participation & Presentations:	35%
Final Paper:	15%

Students' steady improvement over the course of the semester will result in greater weight being given to later assignments to reflect that improvement.

Grading Rubric

Each paper will receive 2 grades, one for analysis and one for writing structure. The 2 grades will be weighted equally for the total grade for the paper. You can choose to re-do your paper in order to raise your *writing structure* grade only; re-dos are due the second class day following return of the original to you, but will not accepted thereafter.

In general, to receive a grade of A, students' papers must be polished (not obvious first drafts) and contain virtually no writing errors. An A paper has a strong and clearly stated thesis, with a fully developed and insightful argument supported by research and clear logic. Writing is clear, concise, coherently organized and persuasive. Research utilized is highly relevant to the argument and presented accurately and completely.

B papers will be held to the same standards as the A paper, with a minimal number of writing errors, only minor problems with organization and logic, and arguments that may not be completely supported.

C papers are those that contain significant sentence structure and grammar problems, arguments based more on personal assertion than supported with research, or with research that is not applicable to the argument.

D papers are those that contain only a modicum of the elements of an A paper, having some valuable content, but which is simply inserted without making intelligible arguments.

F papers are problematic on all levels, reflect little to no work on research, development of argument and may have such poor written structure that it is improper.

Late papers will be not be accepted more than 2 calendar days following the original due date. The grade will be reduced by one letter grade for each day late. Let us know before the deadline if there are extenuating circumstances which make completion of an assignment impossible.

Learning objectives for First Year Writing Intensive Seminars include:

1. Enhance students' understanding of the central place of writing and communication in the learning process and in academic life.
2. Learn strategies for analyzing, synthesizing, and responding to college-level readings.
3. Improve abilities to communicate correctly and effectively in writing and in speech, taking into account audience and purpose.
4. Become comfortable with writing as a process and learn strategies—for instance, prewriting, outlining and revision—for working through that process.
5. Learn appropriate use of the work of others and, where necessary, specific practices of citation.
6. Learn to articulate oral arguments and to respond productively to arguments of others in formal presentations and in class discussion.

While the Honor Code of Rice University still governs the work of first year students in this seminar, one of the purposes of FWIS is to help new students understand the obligations and requirements of the Honor Code, particularly in a course dealing with the standard rules relating to attribution of sources, citation and paraphrasing, etc. As instructors, we will take an educational approach to violations of the rules and (at least initially) deal with violations in style and attribution in the grading process. However, repeated violations of the same type will not be tolerated, and more egregious violations of the Honor Code (including, but not limited to passing off another's work as that of the student or wholesale lifting of wording from a source without attribution) may still result in referring the student to the Honor Council. Every assignment turned in must have a handwritten pledge: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received any unauthorized aid on this assignment."

Disability Policy: If you have a documented disability that requires academic accommodation, please confer with us during the first week of class. All arrangements made will be confidential. If you have not already done so, you must contact Disability Support Services in the Allen Center.